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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA WILL HOST EXERCISE THOKGAMO: TOWARD THE CREATION OF THE AU SOUTHERN AFRICAN BRIGADE

1. Summary: Lt. General Matshengeyo Fisher, Commander of Botswana's Defense Force, on May 27 briefed the Ambassador, DATT and Pol/Econ Chief on the French-supported RECAMP exercises to be held June 10-25 in northern Botswana. Thirteen countries of the southern African region are expected to contribute 2,842 participants. The objective is to achieve interoperability for the southern African brigade that, within the African Union framework, will eventually be deployed for peacekeeping operations. Fisher's PowerPoint presentation dwelled on the costs of the exercise and the budget shortfalls for it, with a broad hint that USG financial support would be greatly welcome. End summary.

2. Ambassador Huggins met with Botswana's Defense Force's (BDF) General Matshengeyo Fisher on May 27 at the latter's request, at the BDF headquarters in Mogoditshane. Also present were DAO and PolOff. The meeting was called at General Fisher's request. He began by describing Exercise Thokgamo (the word refers to calmness or peace), a brigade-sized multi-national peacekeeping exercise, and a continuation of military cooperation between Botswana and France, specifically under the RECAMP program, which reinforces African peacekeeping capabilities. Hosted by the BDF, and to take place from June 10-25, all Southern African Development Community (SADC) members had been invited. Fisher expressed pleasure at Angola's confirmation of participation. Exercise Thokgamo would be held in four locations adjacent to the Okavango Delta, near Maun. The objective would be to provide practice in conducting a multinational PKO under a UN, and AU or SADC mandate for what would eventually be a SADC brigade within the African Union ambit. At present, Fisher stated, the SADC brigade is still in the planning stage, and would go through military officers' committees before being submitted to SADC's council of ministers and then the SADC summit.

3. General Fisher's PowerPoint presentation showed that all 13 SADC countries would send battalions (numbering 1,721 troops) and companies. The 14th Infantry Brigade would be divided into the 141st Battalion headed by Botswana, and would consist of 461 troops, with A Company (160) from Botswana; B Company from Malawi (142) and C Company (159) from Lesotho. The 142nd Battalion, headed by Zimbabwe, would consist of 510 troops, and would be formed by A Company (Zimbabwe, 200); B Company (Botswana 160) and C Company (Mozambique 150). The 143rd Battalion, headed by Zambia, at 760 strong, would consist of A Company (Zambia, 180); B Company (Botswana 160); C Company (Swaziland, 170); D Company (Angola, 100); E Company (Namibia, 150). (Note: All unit designations are fictitious and were created for the purpose of this particular Peacekeeping exercise).

4. Specialized elements participating will include: Paratroopers Company (150 from RSA); Signals Company (Botswana, 94); Engineers Company (Botswana 95); Belligerents-rebel forces (Botswana, 300); Special Forces (Botswana, 20); Ex Support Troops (300). RSA would contribute 150 paratroopers; there would be 4 specialized companies totaling 400 troops, the air component would number 120, the French participants would be 93; the exercise support troops would total 300, and the joint military headquarters would number 58. An unspecified number of Military Police, Medical Support, Geospatial specialists (Botswana and RSA) and Logistically Support elements (RSA) would also be deployed. A total of 2,842 persons would be engaged in the exercise. General Fisher stated that Mozambique had committed to send a peacekeeping force to Burundi following the exercise.

5. The rest of the presentation was devoted to tallying the costs, especially those for transportation/fuel by road and by air, and feeding costs. The entire exercise was calculated to amount over USD BWP 4,124,500.00 (approx. USD 756,500). General Fisher stated that his budget had decreased over the past years. While France and RSA can manage cost-sharing, other nations might be able to contribute partially, but insufficient to cover the financial outlay. Fisher stated he had appealed to ambassadors from EU countries as well as to SADC, but he left the door open for the USG to contribute, and reiterated that the exercise was a necessary first step prior to actual

PKO by the units. Interoperability was the key word.

16. Our response was noncommittal, given the proven USG record of military assistance to the BDF. Ambassador Huggins asked whether there would be standardization of equipment once the SADC brigade would be formed. Fisher responded that it would be difficult to say. DAO observed that memorandums of understanding provide a mechanism for regional militaries to agree to standardize. When discussion turned to Botswana's current status in contributing to PKO on the continent, General Fisher pointed out that Botswana has only one C-130 in functioning order. He was dissatisfied with the repairs done on the other by RSA company Denel.

17. Ambassador Huggins noted that in a discussion with FonMin Meraphe, Botswana's contribution to UN PKO in Darfur was described as being 2 police officers and 1 Lt.-Col. General Fisher stated that a further 10 experts had been requested and the GOB had approved this. Fisher added since the initial request the AU has requested three more officers, one brigadier and two lieutenant colonels. The request for the additional three officers was likely to be approved.

18. Comment: Given the meager contribution of GOB thus far to PKO in Darfur, proportionate to the USG military assistance extended to the BDF, General Fisher's request to us for further financial aid for Exercise Thokgamo fell flat, as he himself realized. Although logical to hold a regional exercise before actual PKO deployment, Botswana's BDF hosts will have to look elsewhere for immediate support for their June 10-21 exercise.

HUGGINS